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ear—if it will not betray us to the inquisitors of the press—that neither also is “The Man with the Hoe” Mr. Edwin Markham’s masterpiece. W. N. GUTHRIE.

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MACKAIL’S “LIFE OF MORRIS.”

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM MORRIS. By J. W. Mackail. 2 vols. Longmans, Green, & Co. 1899.

We believe that even William Morris himself, fastidious as he was about books, would say that this biography devoted to him is a worthy specimen both of the art of the biographer and of that of the bookmaker. It is one of the finest products of the Chiswick Press, and is well illustrated, especially with drawings by Mr. E. H. New, of the famous houses with which Morris is associated. As for Mr. Mackail’s work, it is what one would expect from his pen; and if Sir Edward Burne-Jones, who urged its inception, were alive, he would surely say that Morris could hardly have had a more sympathetic biographer. That Morris of all men needs such a biographer is apparent. He was a poet, a painter, an architect, a designer, a practical dyer, weaver, and what not, a specialist in Icelandic lore, a printer, an illuminator of books, a socialist, a manufacturer—and finally a hot-headed, impulsive man, not to be included under any formula whatsoever. Now, to present such a subject properly a biographer must either be equally many sided or else possess abundance of imagination and sympathy as well as judgment. We think that Mr. Mackail possesses these requisites—perhaps his classical training has given them to him, although at first blush one would say that Morris was the last man with whom a classicist would sympathize.

Be this as it may, Mr. Mackail has sympathized with Morris in every phase of his multiform activity, and, what is more, he has written so as to make his reader sympathize. For this is not a biography of the modern kind—to wit, a bundle of letters strung on a biographical string. It makes use of letters and diaries—and in one or two places might perhaps have dispensed with them—but on the whole it is an ordered and lucid account of Morris’s life as Mr. Mackail

understands it to have been lived. That the "Life and Letters" method has its advantages may be freely admitted, but these are chiefly apparent either when the subject is a great letter writer like Lord Byron or when the biographer himself is a nobody. When the subject is not a great letter writer and when letters of his contemporaries are used as padding the result is often a book that disappoints readers with a sense for form. Now Morris, although not a bad letter writer, was assuredly not a great one, and Mr. Mackail is very far from being a nobody. On the contrary, he is an admirable biographer, and we are very glad that he took the trouble to write Morris's life instead of merely compiling it.

The first chapter treats Morris's early life at Walthamstow, Woodford, and Marlborough, at the first of which places he was born of well-to-do parents on March 24, 1834. Nothing specially remarkable is related of his early days, unless it be his riding about in a little suit of armor or his love of wandering in Epping Forest. The years at Oxford, on the other hand, are full of interest. Here his poetical talents first became manifest, and here his exquisite friendship with Burne-Jones began. Here, too, the work of the Pre-Raphaelites began to affect him and the "Brotherhood" of which he was the leading spirit. The *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, on which Morris spent time and money, and the choice of architecture as a profession, belong to this period. Then comes the influence of Rossetti, who unfortunately does not and cannot appear in this book at his best, the removal to London, the artistic *ménage* with Burne-Jones in Red Lion Square, the interest in designing furniture, the silly but charming experiment of painting the walls of the debating hall of the Oxford Union, and the publication of "The Defense of Guenevere." It is a full life for a man just twenty-five, but a new turn was given to it by his marriage with Miss Jane Burden in April, 1859.

Marriage meant an establishment; and as houses and furniture in that day could not suit an artist like Morris, and as he was well off, a new house had to be designed and built—Red House, Upton. This had to be furnished, and from

now on Morris's love for the artistic handicrafts was a ruling passion. Another consequence was the formation of the firm of Morris & Co., for the production of stained glass, artistic furniture, ecclesiastical decorations, and the like (1861). The revolution wrought by this company in English taste is too well understood to be dwelt upon; but it should never be forgotten that Morris was the soul of the movement and that he was ultimately treated very badly by some of his associates. Love of artistic beauty does not always mean love of the beautiful in conduct.

The years 1865 to 1870 are marked not only by artistic and commercial but also by poetical activity. They are the years of "The Life and Death of Jason" and "The Earthly Paradise"—the works by which this versatile genius will be perhaps best remembered, the works in which his undying love for the Middle Ages finds its fullest expression and in which our noble poet Chaucer finds his nearest modern disciple and rival.

The purchase of Kelmscott House, on the Upper Thames, follows; then the journey to Iceland of 1871, with its powerful effects upon Morris's imagination, never to be shaken off. It is here that Mr. Mackail naturally does much of his quoting from Morris's letters and diary, and it is certainly not the former's fault, though it may be ours, that the chapter does not seem so interesting as one would expect to find it.

We pass over the next three years and all of Morris's publications subsequent to "The Earthly Paradise," because we wish to come quickly to his socialist experiments. Yet we must not forget the interest attaching to his experiments in the languishing art of dyeing (1875); nor his dawning interest in politics, connected with the Eastern question in 1878. We fear Morris's views about war and the glory of the British Empire would hardly be profitable to the devotees of Mr. Kipling.

Morris's socialism forms the main subject of Mr. Mackail's second volume, and is very well handled. That there was something unbalanced about the great genius may as well be admitted frankly—his friends knew that there was whenever

they saw him ram his head against a wall when he was in a passion—but however much we may criticise the seriousness with which he undertook to propagate his views by marching about the streets in a queer dress and in queerer company and by haranguing small crowds who understood scarcely a tithe of what he was saying, it is impossible for us to withhold our admiration and sympathy from so large-hearted, honest, and energetic a man. Nor was Morris lacking in practical wisdom during these years. Mr. Mackail makes it plain that he saw the folly of many of his colleagues and the hopelessness, so far as great immediate results were concerned, of much of his own labor; but he was a man who looked far ahead and saw that individual examples like that set by himself would do much to hasten the revolution which he felt sure must some day come. That his name and example will not be forgotten by socialists is a matter of course, and it would be hard to prove that much of the progress made by socialistic ideas in Great Britain in the past ten years is not in part due to the fact that a wealthy manufacturer and a leading writer dared to forsake the traditions of the middle class and espouse the cause of the most advanced social reformers. For our part we do not hesitate to say that, much as we admire Morris as poet and artistic handicraftsman, it is as socialist, as lover of his brother man to the point of almost absolute unselfishness, that William Morris chiefly appeals to us. And that this is so is mainly due to the admirable success with which Mr. Mackail has presented this period of his hero's career.

Space fails us for any comment upon the interesting closing chapters. By 1890 Morris had seen that he had done all that was then worth doing for active socialism and had determined that the making of socialists "mainly by the quiet influence of ideas" was now the wisest thing that he and his fellow-laborers could attempt. The same year his interest in early and beautiful printing became intense. In 1891 the Kelmscott Press began running, and from then on the joy of publishing superb books like the famous Chaucer helped the noble, indefatigable soul to battle against the

dread disease that was making inroads on what had appeared to be an impregnable constitution. He had worked too fast and done too much, and now he had to pay the penalty. Yet his last years, though pathetic, are not dispiriting; for he kept ripening to the very end and met death as a brave man should on October 3, 1896. It would be too much to say that when he died the most remarkable of our English contemporaries passed away, but it would not be too much to say that England lost more versatility and energy than she is likely soon again to see concentrated in one man. Nor will she soon see a more essentially fine spirit. As poet and designer and craftsman and philanthropist he has left a mark upon Victorian England that cannot be effaced—a mark which, it is only fair to say, Mr. Mackail has deepened by the biography we have so imperfectly reviewed.